

House Fish Wildlife and Parks Committee March 17, 2011 RM 152 Hearing the Following Bills:

- SB 144 Revise laws governing translocation of bison; prohibit free-roaming bison.
- SB 174 Prohibit state funds for movement or relocation of bison to Spotted Dog WMA.
- HB 318 County oversight on movement of wild bison.

Dear Legislators of the House Fish Wildlife and Parks Committee:

When the first European immigrants set foot in Montana in 1805 they reported a wildlife resource that *"for variety and abundance exceeded anything the eye of man had ever looked upon."* Eighty years later, Theodore Roosevelt wrote of a ranchman looking for grazing opportunity who made a journey from Little Missouri North Dakota across northern Montana to within sight of what would become Glacier Park. TR described the trip as a journey of 1,000 miles and then he wrote: *"to use the ranchman's own words, I was never out of sight of a dead buffalo and never in sight of a live one."* In eighty short years Montana was reduced to a wildlife bone-yard bleaching in the summer sun.

Two years later TR and others formed the Boone and Crockett Club aimed at introducing America to the sporting code and beginning the restoration of wildlife to a continent. When we entered the 20th century there were an estimated ½ million deer left in America, today there are 30 million whitetailed deer alone; elk had dwindled to about 40,000 and today there are nearly a million; antelope had faded to about 12,000, today they exceed a million. The restoration, led by American hunters, created a continental pyramid of wildlife that in Montana includes almost everything Lewis and Clark commented on.

Now, a century and a quarter after that cowboy's journey, through the 1,000 mile wildlife bone-yard, we stand restored or nearly so. Our wonderful restored abundance may have put a few bears in our orchards, a little goose dung on your golf shoe, and if you look close you can find deer droppings on the capital lawn. It is, however, all part of the greatest wildlife restoration saga in human history - and the buffalo, of all animals, deserves to be a part of that legacy.

To deny this consummate achievement in American wildlife restoration because of some dogmatically held political ideology would be a shameful tragedy. To do it in Montana would simply compound the shame. Who among us would stand before the children of posterity and tell them we came within one species of restoring, managing and appreciating all the wildlife of what we euphemistically called "The Last Best Place" – but then in 2011 -- we choked?

Please vote NO on SB144, SB 174 and HB 318, thank you.

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